

MANY STRONG VOICES: UNITING TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ARCTIC AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

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the dangers of climate change. His research reinforced what Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic and other parts of the world were saying – that the environment was changing in an unprecedented ways; it just took the rest of the world a while to catch up.

This article explores some of the similarities between the Arctic and SIDS as they confront the challenge of climate change. The Arctic and SIDS are considered barometers of global environmental change and, as such, they will be critical testing grounds for processes and programmes aimed at strengthening the adaptive capacities of human societies. Lessons learned through the Many Strong Voices Programme will support policy processes at the local, regional and international levels, and will provide decision-makers both in the Arctic and SIDS with the knowledge to safeguard and strengthen vulnerable regional social, economic and natural systems.

LINKS BETWEEN THE ARCTIC AND
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

At first glance, the Arctic and SIDS appear to have little in common. One is cold, the other is mostly hot. One is seen as an empty and pristine wilderness, untouched by human activities or, alternatively, as a storehouse for vast

mineral wealth, ripe for exploitation. The other is portrayed in vacation posters as a gentle, tropical paradise where the living is easy, the sun always shines, and the beaches are endless.

But a closer examination reveals some interesting and important similarities. Both regions are homelands to a diverse number of indigenous peoples who, to varying degrees, have been colonized over the last few centuries. People in both regions continue to rely on natural resources – animals, fish and plants – and the environment. In both regions, traditional knowledge continues to inform decision-making and many people retain a connection to the environment through a body of traditional knowledge developed over the centuries.



Our rights, our human rights that we share with all of you – to live as we do and to enjoy our unique culture as part of the globe's cultural heritage, are at issue. The Arctic dimension and Inuit perspectives on global climate change need to be heard in the corridors of power¹."

INTRODUCTION

TThere is no equity in the effects of climate change. The majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions have come from the developed world's wealthiest countries. These nations have built economies based on access to cheap fuel and cheap commodities, the latter often coming from the developing world. The impacts of climate change and the current petroleum focussed economic model are being felt the most in the regions that have traditionally produced the least greenhouse gases. Among these, two of the most vulnerable regions are the Arctic and Small Island Developing States² (SIDS). Within these regions, the most affected populations tend to be Indigenous Peoples.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was unequivocal in its 4th assessment report last year: unless there are deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions, there will be dramatic effects on water, ecosystems, food supplies, coastal areas and human health. The number of unpredictable extreme weather events will continue to increase.

But the signals that something is wrong have been with us for some time. In 1988, James Hansen, head of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at NASA, warned about

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“The end of all knowledge is to understand what is fit to be done, for to know what has been, and what is, and what may be, does but tend to that.”

SAMUEL BUTLER

Another more unfortunate similarity is that the effects of climate change are perhaps greater and more noticeable in the Arctic and SIDS than in many other places around the globe. The 2005 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) predicted that the Arctic will feel the effects of climate change sooner and more severely than other regions of the earth³. It also emphasized the relationship between Arctic climate change, Arctic biophysical processes and global climate. The 2007 Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change echoed and amplified the ACIA findings:

“Arctic human communities are already adapting to climate change, but both external and internal stressors challenge their adaptive capacities. Despite the resilience shown historically by Arctic indigenous communities, some traditional ways of life are being threatened and substantial investments are needed to adapt or re-locate physical structures and communities⁴.”

The report also identified similar effects on small islands:

“Small islands, whether located in the tropics or higher latitudes, have characteristics which make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea-level rise and extreme events. Sea-level rise is expected to exacerbate inundation, storm surge, erosion and other coastal hazards, thus threatening vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities that support the livelihood of island communities⁵.”

In the SIDS, the adverse effects of sea level rise and continued climate change seriously threaten sustainable development. Many small islands are already confronting risks from environmental hazards

including coastal flooding, cyclones and storm surges. And on the near horizon is the spectre of populations being forced to abandon their homes for refuge in other countries.

INDIGENOUS OBSERVATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN
THE ARCTIC AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

While the scientific consensus on the impacts of climate change on vulnerable⁶ regions like the Arctic and SIDS has been building over the last few years, people who live there have long observed environmental changes.

In the Arctic, the nature of these observations are well-illustrated by *Voices from the Bay*, a groundbreaking study which looked at Inuit and Cree experiences in the huge watershed of Canada’s Hudson Bay and published by the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee and the Community of Sanikiluaq in 1996. It found that indigenous peoples had been noticing “highly variable” weather in the northwest corner of the bay since the 1940s.

“There used to be more clear, calm days, winters were colder, and low temperatures persisted longer. By the early 1990s, weather changes were quick, unexpected, and difficult to predict. Blizzards, for example, would occur on clear days in the Chesterfield Inlet area, but on days when environmental indicators suggested a blizzard, it would not materialize⁷.”

The dilemma of traditional knowledge failing in the light of changing environmental conditions was summed up by Helen Atkinson from the Cree community of Chisasibi, Québec:

“We cannot make predictions anymore. We don’t know if the water is going to freeze or not. We used to know what was going to happen at certain seasons but, with all the changes in the climate and different qualities of water, we can’t make those predictions anymore⁸.”

SIDS have always been vulnerable to extreme weather events and other environmental disasters and there is increasing recognition of the threat posed by climate change⁹. Like Arctic residents, people in the South Pacific know that climate change is not a future event but a present reality.

“The effect of global warming is now being felt in every aspect of the lives of people who live in the Pacific. Reliable statistics now show

that the western Pacific is becoming progressively drier while the eastern Pacific is becoming progressively wetter. Where once we could expect steady rainfall throughout the year, we now receive most of our rainfall in a short period often resulting in floods. These floods, followed by droughts, ruin our food supplies and hurricanes leave us without crops for up to three months. They also cause sedimentation in our lagoons¹⁰.”

Ben Namakin is in his mid-20s

and works for the Conservation Society of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia. He observes:

“During my childhood days in Kiribati, we never experienced severe sea flooding. There were storms, but they weren’t that bad. As the sea levels continue to rise in Kiribati, several king tides hit the island. Saltwater intrusion affects the quality of water in wells, floods taro patches, gardens, and puts stress on plants/trees which are very important to the life and culture of an I-Kiribati. [...] Serious storm surges cause coastal erosion, floods grave yards, and in 2006, led to the collapse of the beautiful Dai Nippon causeway. This incident bore huge costs on the people of Kiribati. They had to build new homes with their own finance, and dig up their deceased relatives from their graves and bury them further inland¹¹.”

This kind of local knowledge and observation is important to developing a complete picture of what is happening in vulnerable regions. The ACIA report, sponsored by the Arctic Council, recognized this and was a landmark study in two significant ways: first, it brought together the latest scientific research and analysis and looked at the implications of climate change on a single region of the



Earth. Second, it incorporated the observations and traditional knowledge of the Arctic's indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples' observations were systematically integrated into the ACIA, making it the first such study to recognize the value of indigenous knowledge. The report's authors ensured that local voices were heard and local information was incorporated in the final results. From northern Russia to Alaska to the Canadian Arctic, Greenland and Sapmi, where the indigenous Saami have traditionally herded reindeer throughout the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, people were reporting changes that were affecting the very structure of their lives and threatening their economic and cultural survival.

MANY STRONG VOICES – THE ARCTIC AND SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPMENT STATES WORKING TOGETHER

There are voices always heard, and voices seldom heard, in the discussions about climate change. People in vulnerable regions are usually among the latter. "Given the similar levels of impact, peoples of the Arctic are working together with people in the small islands of the South Pacific, Caribbean and elsewhere to cooperate on ensuring that the moral imperative of taking action on climate change is heard¹²."

In 2004, discussions between a number of groups, including representatives of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, SIDS and UNEP/GRID-Arendal began on the need for a joint effort to raise awareness about the effects of climate change in the world's most vulnerable regions. Although small in number, the people of the Arctic and SIDS had participated vigorously in a number of international negotiating processes, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In August 2005, Premier Hans Enoksen of Greenland urged Environment Ministers from twenty-five countries meeting in Ilulissat to "bring vulnerable regions of the globe together so that we may learn from each other and work with each other internationally"¹³. Premier Enoksen went on to say that "the Arctic, the Small Island Developing States, low lying states, and sub-Sahara states in Africa need to help each other"¹⁴.

These discussions and concerns led to the development of the Many Strong Voices (MSV) programme¹⁵. With seed money from the Government of Canada and support from the government of Norway, the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation in Canada, the UN Foundation, the US National Science Foundation, and The Christensen

Fund, the MSV programme focuses on the similar concerns and needs of the Arctic and SIDS.

Many Strong Voices is a consortium of indigenous peoples' organizations, researchers, policy-makers and community organizations¹⁶. Over the next five years it will:

- ✓ Carry out comparative climate change vulnerability and adaptation research in the SIDS;
- ✓ Exchange knowledge to help develop regionally-appropriate climate change adaptation strategies;
- ✓ Produce communications, outreach and education tools that will raise the profile of the regions, highlight concerns and enable communities to outline their own solutions; and
- ✓ Combine regional research, the design of adaptation strategies, and communications efforts to increase the visibility of these regions, enhance their influence over global dialogues on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and facilitate the articulation of their adaptation needs.



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An important, though not the only, focus of attention is on negotiations leading to a post-2012 climate change accord to replace the Kyoto Protocol. Participants in MSV are working together to ensure that their voices are heard in discussions on emissions reduction and adaptation in the process outlined in the Bali Action Plan¹⁷, which was negotiated at the December 2007 UNFCCC Conference of the Parties.

The Bali Action Plan calls for "long-term cooperative action, now, up to and beyond 2012" in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assist the most vulnerable regions to adapt to climate change effects already being felt. For the participants in the MSV Programme, the way ahead calls for concrete actions which, in turn, are grounded in

the latest scientific research. At the global level, MSV participants are calling on the developed nations to:

- ✓ Reach a global agreement that keeps temperature increases as far below two degrees Celsius as possible by ensuring large cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.
- ✓ Learn from the experiences of indigenous peoples and islanders with regard to adaptation and assist these communities to build upon their traditional knowledge in this area.
- ✓ Appreciate that there are limitations to their capacity to adapt in the context of runaway climate change. The world's richest countries must help the vulnerable to adapt to climate change by providing adequate financial and technical assistance. For the SIDS and other particularly vulnerable developing countries, this means living up to

existing adaptation funding commitments. Arctic peoples need a commitment from their own countries to fund local adaptation efforts in their regions.

Despite the imminent threat that climate change poses to communities in the Arctic and SIDS, the voices of people living in these two vulnerable regions are often marginalised or overlooked. MSV supports the efforts of people in these regions to make sure their voices are heard in international negotiating processes, and to have access to fora for exchanging the latest information on climate change adaptation. This includes combining scientific and traditional knowledge to ensure that those most in need of help for climate change can be certain of acting on the best information available.

CONCLUSION

MSV participants from the Arctic and SIDS concur with the conclusion of the 2006 Stern Review, which said: “An effective response to climate change will depend on creating the conditions for international collective action¹⁸.”

Action is needed on a number of fronts. For vulnerable regions and peoples, it means lobbying at the UNFCCC negotiations, focussing on the equity and human rights implications of climate change, and grounding their informed arguments in the latest research. It means pushing for a post-Kyoto agreement that recognizes the special circumstances and needs of the people in the Arctic and SIDS. The ACIA referred to the people of the Arctic but the words can be applied to all vulnerable regions. For people “whose future is at stake, having the ability to make choices and changes is a matter of survival, to which all available resources must be applied¹⁹.”

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called climate change “the moral challenge of our generation”. At the plenary session of the Bali conference, Ban told assembled delegates that “the situation is so desperately serious that any delay could push us past the tipping point, beyond which the ecological, financial, and human costs would increase dramatically²⁰.”

Unless the world embraces this moral challenge, the burden of climate change will fall on the most vulnerable regions: areas like the Arctic and SIDS. The call for moral clarity echoes what people in some of the world’s most vulnerable regions have been saying for some time, that there needs to be a recognition that the impacts of climate change are being felt by parts of the world that currently lack the resources to cope with the rapid change they are experiencing. The evidence is clear; it is now time to make the right choices.

little to no opportunity to create economies of scale. Currently, fifty-one small island/developing states and territories are included in the list used by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in monitoring the sustainable development of SIDS. A list of SIDS is available at <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrlls/sid/list.htm>

³ ACIA (2004), *Impacts of a Warming Arctic: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment 24-31* (Cambridge Univ. Press 2004).

⁴ *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change: Summary for Policymakers 15* (2007), available at <http://www.gtp89.dial.pipex.com/spm.pdf> (last visited Apr. 8, 2008) [hereinafter WORKING GROUP II].

⁵ WORKING GROUP II, *id.*

⁶ Vulnerability is determined by the level of exposure to a risk, how sensitive the region is to it, and what capacity is available to adapt.

⁷ *Voices from the Bay: Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Inuit and Cree in the Hudson Bay Bioregion 29* (Canadian Arctic Resources Committee 1997) [hereinafter *Voices from the Bay*].

⁸ *Voices from the Bay, id.* at 28-29.

⁹ See UNEP, Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, A/CONF.167/9, part I, Annex I (1994), available at:

<http://islands.unep.ch/dsids/poa.htm#1.%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20AND%20SEALEVEL> (last visited Apr. 1, 2008).

¹⁰ IMOGEN P. INGRAM, *Pacific islands already affected by climate change* (Nov. 2004), available at <http://www.unesco.org/csi/smis/siv/interreg/climate.htm> (last visited Apr. 1, 2008).

¹¹ BEN NAMAKIN, *Climate Witness: Ben Namakin, Kiribati and Micronesia* (May 7, 2007), available at: http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/oceania/index.cfm?uNewsID=100800 (last visited Apr. 17, 2008).

¹² PATRICIA COCHRAN & TAITO NAKALEVU, *Stopping the Slow Wave of Destruction* (Dec. 6, 2007), (last visited Apr. 20, 2008).

¹³ HANS ENOKSEN, Premier of Greenland, *Opening speech to The Greenland Dialogue* (Aug. 16, 2005), available at http://www.nanoq.gl/English/Nyheder/Opening_speech_by_Premier_Hans.aspx (last visited Apr. 16, 2008).

¹⁴ —, *id.*

¹⁵ See also *Many Strong Voices* website, <http://www.manystrongvoices.org> (last visited Apr. 16, 2008).

¹⁶ Some partners include the Arctic Athabaskan Council, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, Center for International Climate and Environment Research – Oslo (CICERO), New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), UNEP/GRID-Arendal, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Climate Law and Policy Project (US), Conservation Society of Ponapeh, Federated States of Micronesia, WWF South Pacific Programme, Organization of American States Department of Sustainable Development, Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union (OCTA).

¹⁷ (Accessed 27 May 2008)

¹⁸ STERN REVIEW on *The Economics of Climate Change*, at xxii, (HM Treasury 2007), available at: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/4/3/Executive_Summary.pdf (last visited Apr. 1, 2008).

¹⁹ ACIA, *supra* note 4, at 95.

²⁰ Spiegel Online International, *Ban Ki-Moon Warns of Climate Change 'Oblivion'* (Dec. 12, 2007), available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,522929,00.html> (last visited Apr. 1, 2008). ■

¹ PATRICIA COCHRAN, Keynote Address at the Many Strong Voices Stakeholders Workshop (May 28, 2007).

² According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, small island/developing states (SIDS) are low-lying coastal countries that share similar sustainable development challenges, including small population, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, and excessive dependence on international trade. Their growth and development is also held back by high transportation and communication costs, disproportionately expensive public administration and infrastructure due to their small size, and